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The background image shows a large, multi-level library atrium. The space is filled with numerous bookshelves on multiple levels, creating a sense of depth and vastness. In the foreground, there are several study desks with blue chairs, arranged in a semi-circular pattern. The lighting is warm and focused on the study areas. The overall atmosphere is one of a well-maintained and extensive library collection.

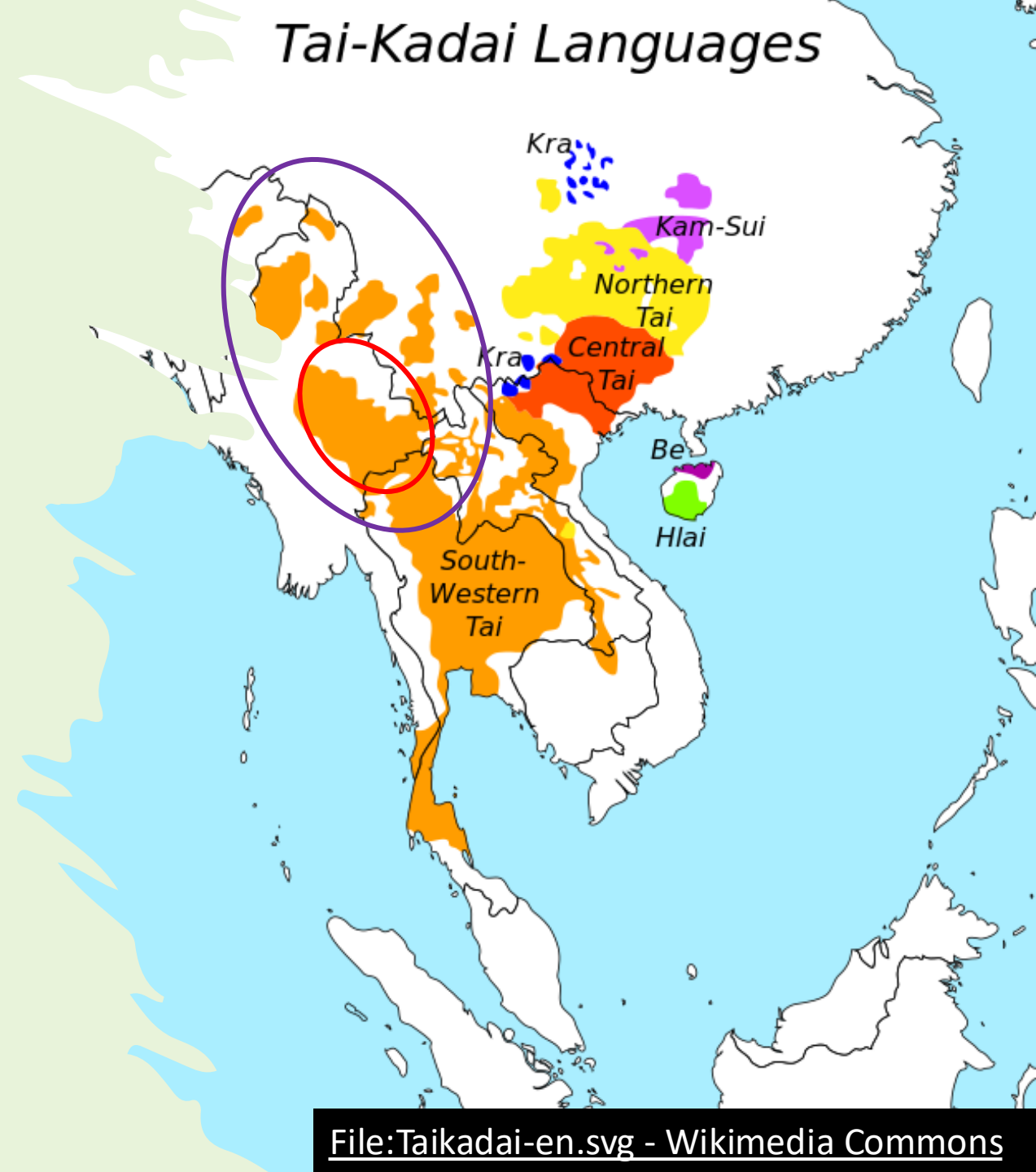
What SOAS Collections Tell Us About 'Shan Studies'

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Jotika Khur-Yearn; SEALG Conference, Passau, 27-28 June 2025

Shan here refers to an Asian ethnic group of people who linguistically belong to the **Kra-Dai** (Tai-Kadai) language family, of which 60% of them speaking Thai, others include Lao, Kra, Sui, **Shan** and other Tai/Dai dialects.





<https://maps.app.goo.gl/wqRrq7XaWq8mo3KP6>

Homes of Shan People

‘Shan Studies’ - Terms of Reference

- referring to both academic teaching and research programmes in a broader sense
- mainly at SOAS but also at other higher institutions around the world.

Early Western Authors on Shan Studies

- Rev. N. Brown (1837). “Alphabets of the Tai language” in the [*Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal*](#), Vol. 6, Issue, 61, pp. 17-21. SOAS Library
- Rev. J. N. Cushing (1871). [*Grammar of the Shan language*](#). (2nd ed. 1887)
-- (1881). *A Shan-English Dictionary*.
- Sir James George Scott & John Hardiman (1900). *Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States*.
- Mrs Leslie Milne (1909). *Shans at Home*.
- Rev. Wilber Willis Cochran (1915). *The Shans*.

Alphabets of the TAI Language

Consonants						Vowels					
Burman	Ahom	Khamti	Shyan	Lao	Roman	Burman	Ahom	Khamti	Shyan	Lao	Roman
က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ခ	မ	မ	မ	ခ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
င	မ	မ	မ	င	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
စ	မ	မ	မ	စ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဆ	မ	မ	မ	ဆ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဃ	မ	မ	မ	ဃ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
တ	မ	မ	မ	တ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ထ	မ	မ	မ	ထ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဒ	မ	မ	မ	ဒ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဝ	မ	မ	မ	ဝ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
န	မ	မ	မ	န	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ပ	မ	မ	မ	ပ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဖ	မ	မ	မ	ဖ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဗ	မ	မ	မ	ဗ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဃ	မ	မ	မ	ဃ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ရ	မ	မ	မ	ရ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
လ	မ	မ	မ	လ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဝ	မ	မ	မ	ဝ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဇ	မ	မ	မ	ဇ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
သ	မ	မ	မ	သ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
ဟ	မ	မ	မ	ဟ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka
အ	မ	မ	မ	အ	ka	က	မ	မ	မ	က	ka

Ahom Inscription of an Assam Rupee.

1837.]

Alphabets of the Tai language.

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4. Where double consonants, as *kl*, *pl*, *kr*, &c. occur at the commencement of a word, as they frequently do in Siamese, the Shyáns and Khamtis, as well as the Láos, soften the pronunciation by omitting the second consonant; but it is preserved by the Ahoms. I will illustrate each of these remarks by a few examples.

Siamese.	Láos.	Shyán.	Khamti.	Ahom.	
1. Bá	bá	má	má	bá	a shoulder.
Bán	bán	mán	mán	bán	a village.
Bín	bín	mín	mín	bín	to fly.
Bó	bó	mó	mó	bó	a well.
2. Dí	dí	lí	lí	dí	good.
Deng	deng	leng	leng	deng	red.
Doi	doi	loi	loi	doi	a mountain.
Dáu	dáu	láu	láu	dáu	a star.
Dūan	dūan	lūn	nūn	dūn	the moon.
3. Rak	rak or hak	hak	hak	rak	to love.
Rái	rái	hái	hái	rái	bad.
Ron	ron	hon	hon	ron	hot.
Rú	rú	hú	hú	rú	to know.
Rūa	rūa	hūa	hūa	rūa	a boat.
Rūan	rūan	hūn	hūn	rūn	a house.
4. Plá	pá	pá	pá	pá	a fish.
Klai	kai	kai	kai	kai	distant.
Klūa	kūa	kūa	kūa	kūa	salt.
Plūk	pūk	pūk	pūk	pūk	a husk.

From these circumstances we may conclude that the Siamese and Ahom dialects afford a more correct specimen of the original Tai language, than either the Láos, Khamti, or Shyán; for it is improbable, if the original forms had been simple and easy of enunciation, that they would have been exchanged for others more difficult; but it is perfectly natural that difficult forms should be exchanged for others more simple.

Explanation of the Table.

It is probable that all the alphabets of the Tai, (if we except the Siamese,) were formed from the Burman. The column of Burman letters is merely added for the purpose of comparison. The Ahom, Khamti, and Shyan alphabets each contain eighteen letters, but this number is quite inadequate to express the various sounds of these languages. The Láos alphabet is more perfect: it contains fewer letters, however, than the Siamese. In the above table we observe that the Láos alphabet contains, to some extent, two distinct characters for each letter of the Ahom and Shyán; one denoting the rising, and the other the falling tone*. The rising-toned letters are set first

* The second column of the Láos consonants embrace the second order or the softer sound of each class of the Indian alphabets, *g gh*; *j jh*; *đ đh*; *ḥ bh*, &c.: the *gh* only is formed differently from the same letter of the Burman alphabet. We have inserted these letters in the Roman column on the above

N. Brown (1837)

It is probable that all the alphabets of the Tai, (if we except the Siamese,) were formed from the Burman.

The column of Burman letters is merely added for the purpose of comparison.

✓ SOAS University of London has Holdings: v.2-v.33 (1833-1864).

[1 Available at 1 Location](#)

Place Hold

GRAMMAR
OF THE
SHAN LANGUAGE:

BY
REV. J. N. CUSHING, D. D.

RANGOON:
AMERICAN BAPTIST MISSION PRESS,
F. D. PHINNEY, SUPT.
1887.

88

SHAN GRAMMAR.

This order is given on the 10th day of the waxing moon
of the 11th month in the year 1238.

CHAPTER XVI.

POETRY.

178. The Shan language favors poetical composition by the modulation of its tones, and the abundance of its synonyms. Almost all religious books are written in a metrical style, and called လိာ်ရှ်, i. e. books in the *preaching* style. These books may be divided into two classes, viz. books which are written in a measured prose, and those which are properly poetical.

Shan books may also be divided into two other classes, viz. လိာ်ပွတ်, i. e. books in whose composition redundant words are not extensively employed; and လိာ်ပွတ်, i. e. books in which many synonymous words are inserted, for the purpose of rendering the style ornate.

179. Among the early metrical writers are Saumûn Htwe (ထင်ပွင်ထွန်), Saumûn Ngün (ထင်ပွင်ပိုင်), and Htam-ma-ting-na (ထံမတိင်အ), who belonged to Theinni and were members of the Buddhist sect called Kōng Lōng (ပိုင်လွင်). Among later writers, are Man Hpai, (မာ်ပိုင်) of Monè, Kāng Hsō, of a small district east of the Salwen bearing that name, both of them belonging to the Kōng Lōng sect, Nā Lōng (အလွင်), of Monè, and Kawri (ခေါ်ခို), of Mōng Pon near Monè. Kāng Hsō died about thirty years ago. He is said to have written more than a hundred books, the most, of which are religious tales. Kawri, whose real name was Kūngna

J. N. Cushing ([1887](#))
Second Edition
First published in [1871](#)

✓ Available

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Invaluable information
about the names of
Shan poets and authors

GAZETTEER
OF
UPPER BURMA
AND THE
SHAN STATES.

IN FIVE VOLUMES.

COMPILED FROM OFFICIAL PAPERS BY

J. GEORGE SCOTT,
BARRISTER-AT-LAW, C.I.E., M.R.A.S., F.R.G.S.

ASSISTED BY

J. P. HARDIMAN, I.C.S.

PART I.—VOL. I.



RANGOON:

PRINTED BY THE SUPERINTENDENT, GOVERNMENT PRINTING, BURMA.

1900.

[PART I, VOLS. I & II.—PRICE: Rs. 12-0-0 = 10s.]

Scott & Hardiman (1900-01)

Gazetteer of Upper Burma and the Shan States

Authors: [J G Scott](#), [J T P Hardiman](#)



Print Book 1900

Rangoon : Superintendent, Government Printing, 1900.

✓ SOAS University of London has pt.1-pt.2

EM551/4527

[10 Available at 1 Location](#)

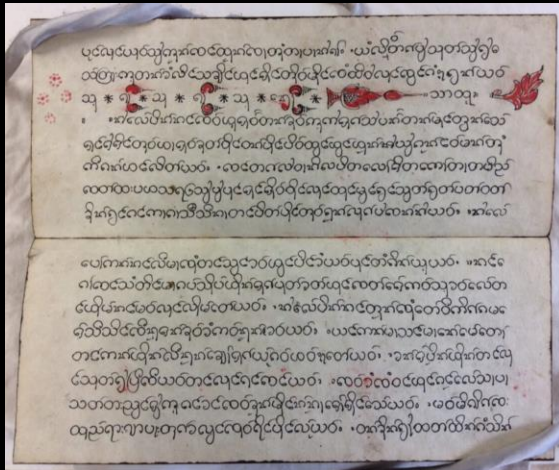


Leslie Milne (1910)

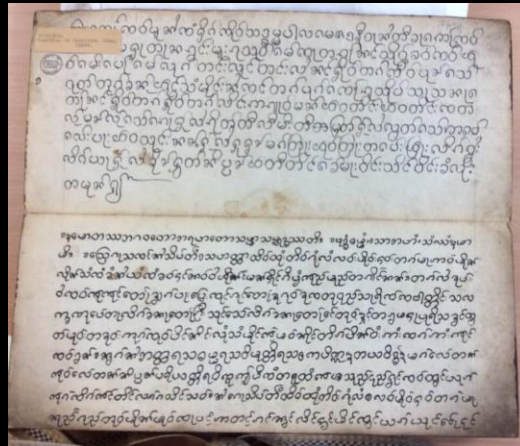
In 5 large volumes, records of information and social conditions of the Shan states up to the late 19th century

Detailing customs and traditions of practices
Literary traditions, recitation of Shan metrical rhyming literature, known as Lik Loung

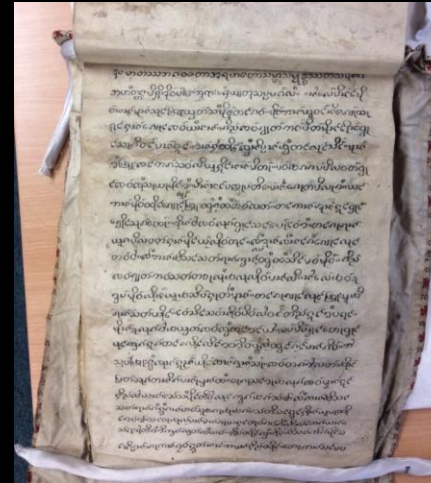
Four of the Shan Manuscripts from SOAS Collection



Nang Yi Hseng Kaw



Saddhammapālamedanī
(soas.ac.uk)



Sutta Nibbana



[Manual of astrological works]
(MS 381239) (soas.ac.uk)

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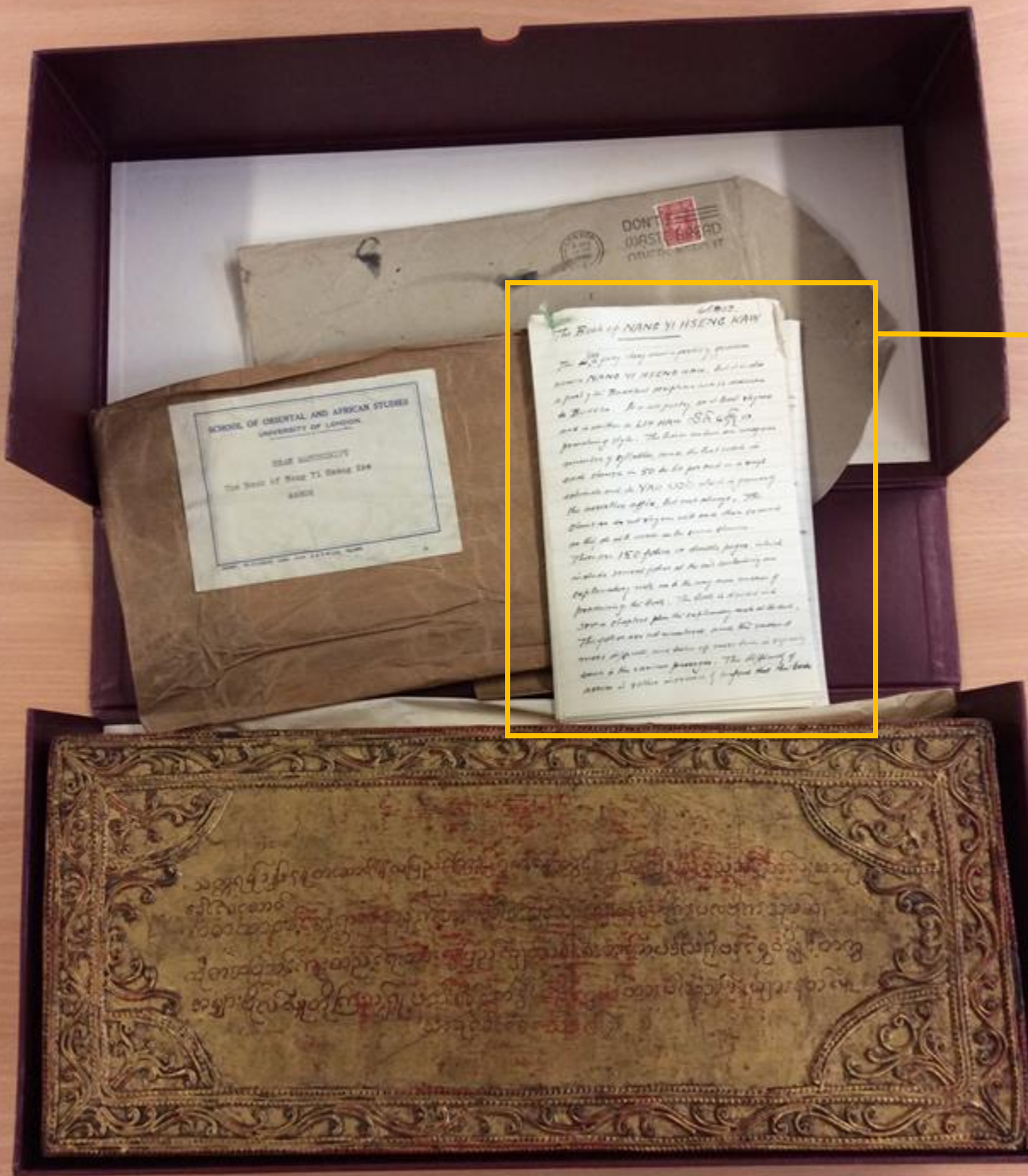


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Special collections of rare books, manuscripts and other forms of archival materials

The library also has notable collections of materials on minority ethnic groups of people and languages



The text of this manuscript was studied and translated into English by **H. J. Inman**, a former British officer who taught Shan language at SOAS between **1936** and **1948**.



Photo: Jotika Khur-Yearn



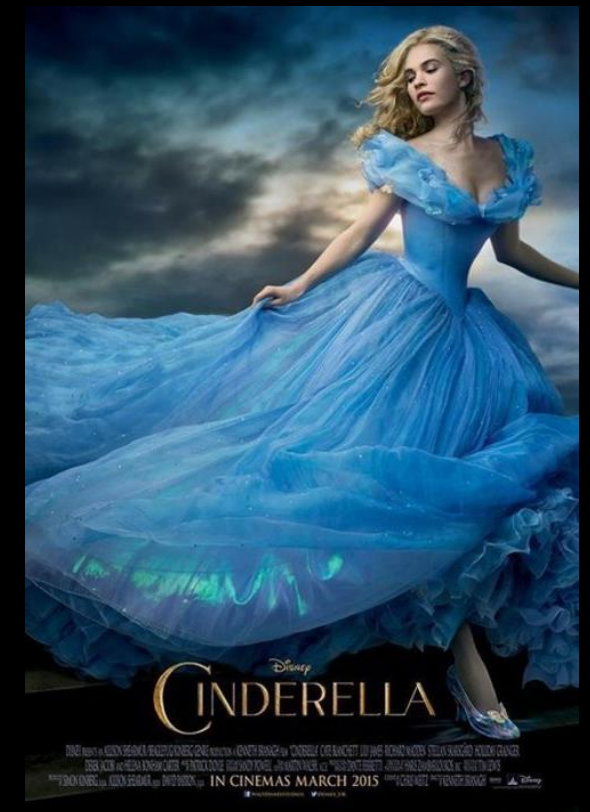
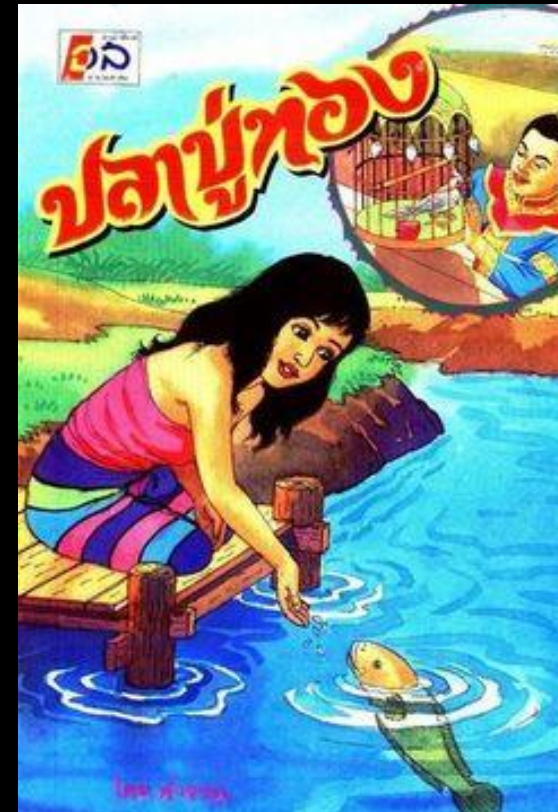
San Myint (IPRD)

ဆင်းယီးသိုင်ဂေါ,

Lady Yi Seng Kaw

(A Shan Version of Cinderella)

Similar Stories from Other Nations



Notable Publications on Shan from 1930s to 1980s

- 1936. Clarence Hendershot . [*The Conquest, Pacification, and Administration of the Shan States by the British, 1886-1897*](#). Part of Thesis (Ph. D.)--University of Chicago, 1936
- 1936. J. G. Scott; G. E. Mitton (ed). [*Scott of the Shan hills; orders and impressions*](#).
- 1957. [မိမိမှ်.လုံး မှ်.လုံးဂုခ်းဂျိခ်း သၢသဆၢ လိုင်တံး မိုင်းတံး။ = မုတ်စုန်းကွင်းဟင်း ဆာဆနာစင်တိုင်း စည်းမျဉ်းဥပဒေ.](#)
- 1965. Sao Saimong Mangrai. [*The Shan States and the British Annexation*](#).
- 1975. E. Michael Mendelson. [*Sangha and state in Burma : a study of monastic sectarianism and leadership*](#). Contains information on Zawti Shan. Fieldwork trip to Burma in 1959. Collected manuscripts, 3 of them housed in SOAS Special Collections.
- 1981. Sao Saimong Mangrai. [*Wat Padaeng chronicle and Keng Tung State chronicle*](#).
- 1987. Chao Tzang Yawngkhwe. [*The Shan of Burma : memoirs of a Shan exile*](#).

Selected Books on Shan from 1990s to Present

- 1992. B. J. Terwiel & Ranoo Wichasin. [*Tai Ahoms and the stars ...*](#)
- 1995. Nicola Tannenbaum. [*Who can compete against the world.*](#)
- 2003. B. J. Terwiel & Chaichuen Khamdaengyottai. [*Shan manuscripts.*](#)
- 2005. Sai Kam Mong. [*History and development of Shan scripts.*](#)
- 2006. Nancy Eberhardt. [*Imagining the course of life.*](#)
- 2006. Susan Conway. [*The Shan: art and culture.*](#)
- 2007. Ranoo Wichasin. [*พื้นเมืองแสนหวี ฉบับหอคำเมืองใหญ่*](#)
- 2008. Yos Santasombat. [*Lak Chang: a reconstruction of Tai identity ...*](#)
- 2008. Volker Grabowsy, Renoo Wichasin. [*Chronicles of Chiang Khaeng ...*](#)
- 2009. Sai Aung Tun. [*History of the Shan State...*](#)
- 2015-2018. [*သိုခ်လိခ်;သိုခ်.ခွါ. ပါင်ဂုမ်သိုခ်,သိုခ်.လိခ်;လွင် ပွတ်ဂမ် \(3\) = တတိယအကြိမ် ရှမ်းပုဂ္ဂိုလ်စာပေ ကွန်ဖရင့် စာတမ်းများ = Collection of research papers, the 3rd Lik Loung Conference \(in volumes\)*](#)
- 2021. Jane M. Ferguson. [*Repossessing Shanland ...*](#)
- 2025. Klemens Karlsson. [*A sense of place and belonging : the Chiang Tung ...*](#)

Highlights of SOAS-based/affiliated Projects on Shan Studies

- 2003. Volker Grabowsky, Andrew Turton. [*The gold and silver road of trade and friendship : the McLeod and Richardson diplomatic missions to Tai states in 1837*](#)
- 2007. [*Shan Buddhism and Culture Conference and proceedings*](#); Selected papers were published in Contemporary Buddhism, [*Special Issue, Shan Buddhism*](#) (2009)
- 2007-. *Shan New Year Events: Academic and Cultural Presentations ...*
- 2009-2010. *Buddhism on the Borderlines and* [*Shan Manuscript Cultures*](#) ...
- 2009-- Jotika Khur-Yearn, co-worker, some major projects on cataloguing and digitization of Shan manuscripts - [*Senami/Oxford*](#), [*Inya Institute*](#), [*MAP/Warsaw*](#)...
- 2012. Jotika Khur-Yearn, [*PhD thesis on traditional Shan literature*](#) ...
- 2014. Kate Crosby. [*Theravada Buddhism: continuity, diversity and identity*](#).
- 2016. Patrick Meehan, [*PhD on political economy ... Shan state, Myanmar*](#) ...
- 2024. Heidi Tan, [*PhD thesis on Pagoda Museums in Myanmar*](#) ...
- 2024--. Heidi Tan, *Shan material cultures* ...
- 2024--. Olivia Porter, *Roles of lay Buddhists in Shan Buddhism* ...
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